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AUTHOR Bradley, Thomas M.
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ABSTRACT

Effective schools research offers administrators evidence of teaching methods that enhance student achievement; imparting this knowledge to faculty through staff development is essential. A solution to the problem of interrupting classroom time for staff development is to utilize teacher time in a nonthreatening method that is collegial in nature. Evening workshops taught by peers have been attractive to teachers in an Illinois school district. Salary schedule credit is an incentive for faculty to participate on their own time. A list of 17 other incentives is given, ranging from material rewards to peer recognition. In the school district described, workshops focus on classroom instructional skills. Examples of successful peer-taught workshops include introduction to computer-assisted instruction and classroom application, competency-based learning, and teacher expectations and student achievement. (CJH)

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Staff Development on Teacher Time: An Incentive Program

by
Thomas M. Bradley Ed. D.

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Background

Much has been written the past two years concerning improving instruction to attain excellence. The heightened public interest in education has led, in turn, to increased legislative pressure on school administrators to improve classroom instruction. To impact upon classroom teaching habits, many administrators have looked to a branch of research known to most as "effective schools" research.

Effective schools research offers administrators evidence of which teaching traits, styles, and methods enhance student achievement. It offers a logical place to start if improving classroom instruction is your goal. For administrators, however, knowledge is only the first step. An essential second step must involve imparting this new knowledge to your faculty. In a phrase, this second step is staff development.

Problem

Armed with apparently accurate information on how to improve instruction, administrators next must ponder a staff development model. A popular model in Illinois involves the use of in-service days. These days are counted by the state as complete school days even though students are in attendance only a half day. The other half day is used for staff development. This approach has two inherent flaws. First, three hours is not enough staff development time to seriously affect how teachers conduct their classrooms. Secondly, the administrator becomes involved in a hypocrisy. The one characteristic of effective instruction agreed upon by most researchers is a high emphasis on "time on task". By interrupting classroom time to provide staff development on effective instruction, the district is shortening "time on task" and negatively affecting classroom learning.

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A Solution

An obvious solution to the "time on task" hypocrisy is to conduct staff development on teacher time not classroom time. Some school districts have attempted to solve the problem exclusively with college coursework. College courses offered in the evenings do not solve the problem. First of all, college coursework requires too much of a time committment from teachers for many to participate. With sixteen clock hours for each semester hour of credit, the average three semester hour college course requires 48 clock hours of time. Most teachers are already burdened with papers to grade and lessons to prepare, and they do not enthusiastically enroll in college evening classes.

Teachers that do enroll in an occasional college evening class find two characteristics discouraging. First, the course is taught by a stranger who evaluates and tests them as though they were novices in education. This is demeaning and frustrating to a teacher. Secondly, the course content frequently offers little that can be put into action in the average classroom. This form of staff development frequently fails to make any impact on classroom instruction.

What can be done in the evenings to improve instruction? There is a less threatening, more relevant way to in-service teachers. Our district has organized our own evening courses. They are only ten clock hours long. They generally involve a two and a half hour meeting one night a week for four weeks. The administration and a committee of teachers design the course objectives and content. The workshop is designed around specific "effective schools" skills and encourages changes in classroom teaching.

Finding a good instructor for a workshop is a vital element to its success. Sometimes we hire a university professor to teach a workshop, but we make it clear to him there are to be no tests or grades. The workshop is to be colleagial in nature and non-threatening. While this works to some extent, the best instructors are our own faculty members.

Our greatest successes in staff development have come when our teachers have taught their peers. So far seven of our teachers have presented evening workshops and participation is astounding. Instead of having perhaps eight to ten of our teachers taking a college course once, we are having to limit our workshops to twenty-four participants and offer the course two to three times. Some workshops have been offered as many as six times with a minimum of ten teachers enrolling each time.

Of course we do not always have someone on our faculty qualified to teach a workshop on the specific teaching skill we want stressed. Instead of looking elsewhere, we have been sending teachers to be trained by experts. We pay their transportation and tuition, and when they have gained some expertise, they share their new knowledge with their fellow teachers by conducting a workshop.

These non-threatening evening workshops taught by their peers are attractive to our teachers. We are committed to staff development to improve instruction in our district, and so we also use other incentives to encourage our faculty to participate in workshops on their own time.

Incentives

Since money is a motivator in our society, salary schedule credit is offered to those teachers with perfect attendance in a ten hour workshop. A ten hour workshop is worth one continuing education unit (CEU) on our salary schedule.

Some administrators may resent this policy, and yet most districts award salary schedule credit for college coursework. With our workshops we at least know what the objectives are, and know they are congruent with our district's goals. With college courses we have no such assurance.

A list of incentives used in our district range from material rewards to peer recognition. The total list is as follows:

A. Teacher involvement in planning (committee of nine)

B. Peer instructors

C. Salary schedule credit

D. No tuition

E. Non-graded format

F. Non-threatening environment (lounge)

G. Convenient locations (no travel time)

H. Convenient timing (4 p.m. - 6:30 p.m.)

I. Free refreshments

J. Immediate application to classroom teaching

K. Self-renewal and gratification

L. Peer recognition

M. Free materials

N. Colleagial attitude and sharing

A few of our workshops also involve these incentives:

A. Dinner meeting format

B. Occasional release time

C. Special travel and training for peer instructors

Content

To attract interest among our faculty members, our first evening workshops were suggested by our faculty committee with few restrictions as to topic. Now our workshops focus on classroom instructional skills. Some of our more successful peer taught workshops include:

A. Introduction to Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI)

B. Classroom Applications of CAI

C. Software Revue

D. Project T.E.A.C.H.

E. Teaching through Learning Channels

F. Competency Based Learning

G. Mastery Learning

H. Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement (T.E.S.A.)

For further information on this topic feel free to contact the author at the following address:

Dr. Thomas Bradley
Pekin Community High School
East Campus
Pekin, Il. 61554